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RATHER: The CIA's heavy involvement in covert war operations against Nicaragua has triggered a bitter feud between the agency's director, William Casey, and members of Congress. Many lawmakers have been calling for Casey's resignation. CBS News congressional correspondent Phil Jones tonight reports that Casey now has sent a hand-written letter to Senate Intelligence Committee chairman Barry Goldwater, and in it, Casey apologized for the way he has been dealing with Congress. But as Robert Schakne reports, there remains considerable congressional concern.

SCHAKNE: CIA Director William Casey, says a Republican senator on the Intelligence Committee, rates 'two on a scale of 10' in matters of trust. A Democratic member of the Senate staff once said that Casey's attitude toward Congress adds up to 'criminal casualness.' Not since the mid-1970s have relations between the CIA and Congress been so poisonous and that the eye of the storm is the CIA director himself, with his emphasis on covert operations, his fixation for secretiveness. REP. NORMAN MINETA (D-Calif.): He's the type of person unless you ask the right question, you don't get an answer. A Republican member of the Senate described him as a person who, if you're coat was on fire, he wouldn't tell you unless you asked him. SEN. DAVID DURENBERGER (R-Minn.): We have to be able to say, you know, 'We trust you. We trust that you've told us everything there is to know on which we can base our judgment.' If we don't have that trust, then the whole system collapses.

SCHAKNE: Congressional fury centers around Casey's delay in disclosing the CIA's role in the raids that blew up Nicaragua's oil storage tanks last fall and in the mining of Nicaragua's harbors this winter. A 1980 law requires the CIA director to keep congressional intelligence committees, quote, 'fully and currently informed,' unquote and when new operations are planned, to inform the committee's in advance of, quote, 'any significant anticipated intelligence activity,' unquote. CIA spokesmen say that Casey or his deputies met the requirements of the law in 30 meetings about Central

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America with the two congressional intelligence committees, but committee members say the records of the meetings with Congress show no advance notification of either the oil storage raids or the mining and no detailed briefing about the mining for the Senate until this month. And the chairman of the Intelligence Committee was still angry about that today. SEN. BARRY GOLDWATER (R-Ariz.): Casey never told us what was going on. I don't care how many times he said he did; he didn't.

SCHAKNE: Casey's troubles with Congress date back to his first six months in 1981 as CIA director when conservative Republicans, among them Intelligence Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater and Republican Sen. Ted Stevens, were demanding his ouster. The issue then as now, Casey's failure to keep Congress informed. MINETA: He doesn't tell us. We can only find out as we try and dig and probe and cajole, harass, whatever you want to call it. But that's the only way we get information. It's like pulling teeth.

SCAKNE: Congressmen may fume about him, but only President Reagan can fire Casey, and the president remains fiercely loyal to his CIA director. What Congress can do, however, is cut off money for the CIA's covert war in Central America, and in the bitter feuding, that is looking more and more possible. Robert Shakne, CBS News, Washington.